

# The Arts Vocabulary – Visual Arts

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## Visual Art Glossary

**Abstract.** Artwork in which little or no attempt is made to represent images realistically, and objects are often simplified or distorted.

**Acrylic.** A fast-drying, water-based plastic polymer painting medium.

**Aesthetics.** A branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature of beauty, the nature and value of art, and the inquiry processes and human responses associated with those topics.

**Analysis.** In art criticism, discovering how the principles of art are used to organize the art elements. In art history, determining the style of the artwork.

**Architecture.** The art and science of designing and erecting buildings.

**Armature.** Supporting structure for sculpture.

**Art Criticism.** Describing and evaluating the media, processes, and meanings of works of visual art, and making comparative judgments.

**Art Elements.** Visual arts components, such as line, texture, color, form, value, shape, and space.

**Art History.** A record of the visual arts, incorporating information, interpretations, and judgments about art objects, artists, and conceptual influences on developments in the visual arts.

**Artifact.** An object representing a particular culture or stage of technological development.

**Art Media.** Broad categories for grouping works of visual art according to the art materials used.

**Assemblage.** Sculpting technique in which the artist gathers and joins together a variety of materials.

**Asymmetry.** A type of balance in works of art in which parts on opposite sides of a perceived midline give the appearance of equal visual weight.

**Atmospheric Perspective.** Objects in the distance appear less distinct in form and more muted in color.

**Background.** The area of an artwork that appears to be behind other objects or farther away from the viewer.

**Balance.** Element of design that deals with equally arranging visual elements in a work of art.

*Symmetrical* – Formal balance in which two halves or sides of a design create a mirror image.

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*Asymmetrical* – Another name for informal balance, in which unlike objects have equal visual weight or eye attraction.

*Radial Balance* – Type of balance in which forces or elements branch out from a central axis in a circular pattern.

**Bas-relief.** Sculpture in which areas project slightly from a flat surface.

**Blending.** Technique of shading through smooth, gradual application of value.

**Calligraphy.** An Asian method of beautiful handwriting.

**Carving.** A subtractive form of sculpture, in which the material is cut, chipped, or drilled away from a solid material to create a sculpture.

**Casting.** Process of sculpture in which a molten metal or substance is poured into a mold and allowed to harden.

**Ceramic.** Art of making objects with clay to produce pottery and sculpture.

**Chiaroscuro.** Method of arranging light and shadow in two-dimensional art to create the illusion of three-dimensional form.

**Clay.** A natural earthly material which is plastic when wet and becomes hard and brittle upon treatment by high heat (firing).

**Coil.** Long roll of clay joined into a circle or spiral.

**Collage.** Artwork onto which materials such as textured paper and fabric are attached.

**Color.** Element of design that is a property of light.

*Primary* – red, yellow, blue

*Secondary* – orange, green, violet (made from the primary colors)

*Tertiary* – produced by mixing two secondary colors.

*Intensity* – brightness of color.

*Value* – lights and darks of a color or greys.

*Hue* – name of color.

**Color Schemes.** Plan for organizing color.

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*Complementary* – colors opposite each other on a standard color wheel.

*Analogous* – colors which are closely related to each other and in which common color can be found (yellow, yellow-orange, orange, etc.)

*Monochromatic* – tones of one color in addition to the main hue

*Triad* – any three colors found on a standard color wheel that are connected by a triangle (red, yellow, and blue)

*Intermediate* – colors made from a primary and secondary (blue-green, yellow-orange)

*Split complement* – color on either side of the direct complement (blue-green, yellow-green).

*Cool Colors* – Colors in which blue, green or violet predominate.

*Warm Colors* – Colors in which red, orange or yellow predominate.

**Color Wheel.** Sectioned circle with colors in a bent spectrum.

**Composition.** The ordered arrangement of the elements of art according to the principles of design.

**Concept.** An abstract or general idea

**Conjoint.** Carried on by two or more people in combination; cooperative participation; teacher guided.

**Contemporary.** Modern; current; coming into being during the same period of time.

**Content.** Meaning and significance; events, physical detail, and information in a work of art.

**Contour Line.** A line that defines the edges and surface ridges of an object.

**Contrast.** Differences between two or more elements (e.g., value, color, texture) in a composition; juxtaposition of different elements in a work of art. Also, the degree of difference between the lightest and darkest parts of a picture.

**Conventional Performances.** Only giving back certain identified "facts, concepts or problem sets" (one answer tests that do not require understanding of subject matter).

**Criteria.** Standards of judgement.

**Critique.** Evaluating, judging, synthesizing, analyzing.

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**Cross Hatching.** Superimposed layers of parallel lines (hatching) at an angle to one another; used to create shadow and modeling.

**Culture.** Socially transmitted behaviors, arts, beliefs, institutions and all products of human work and thought, considered as the expression of a particular period, class, community or population.

**Decorative.** Ornamental; beauty over function.

**Design.** An artwork that has a planned arrangement of elements and principles.

**Dimension.** Amount of space an object takes up in one direction.

**Dominance.** The importance of the emphasis of one aspect in relation to all other aspects of a design.

**Dominant.** Element of a work of art that is noticed first.

**Drawing.** An art technique using pencil, pen, brush, charcoal, crayon, pastel or stylus.

**Dye.** Pigments that dissolve in liquid.

**Fabric.** Material made from fibers.

**Fiber.** Thin, threadlike linear material that can be woven or spun into fabric.

**Figure-ground.** In design, the background and the main subject.

**Focal Point.** The first part of a work to attract the attention of the viewer.

**Foreground.** In a visual work, the area that appears to be closest to the viewer.

**Foreshortening.** Method of drawing or painting an object or person so that it seems to go back into space.

**Form.** Element of art that is three-dimensional and encloses space. Form has length, width, and depth.

**Freestanding.** Work of art surrounded on all sides by space.

**Function/Functional.** Purpose of an art work; designed chiefly from the point of view of use.

**Genre.** The representation of people, subjects and scenes from everyday life.

**Gesture Drawing.** Quick sketch used to capture the movement or position of a figure.

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**Glaze.** A gloss or mat coating developed on clay under heat.

**Global.** Worldwide.

**Gradation.** Gradual transition from one form or element to another with slight changes in value.

**Graphics.** Images and words generated by hand or computer.

**Handbuilt.** Forming without mechanical manipulation (usually referring to clay).

**Harmony.** The principle of design that creates unity in a work of art by stressing similarities of separate but related parts.

**Hatching.** Small, grouped lines made in drawing or engraving.

**Icon.** Symbol or image.

**Illustrate.** Create visual images that complement written words.

**Interface.** To interact or coordinate harmoniously.

**In the Round.** Freestanding sculpture surrounded on all sides by space.

**Intuitive.** Perceived knowledge from experience and feelings.

**Jewelry.** An ornament for personal adornment.

**Judgement.** In art criticism, determining the degree of artistic merit. In art history, determining the contribution of a work of art to the history of art.

**Kinetic.** Work of art that actually moves in space.

**Line.** A point moving in space. Line can vary in width, length, curvature, or direction.

**Linear Perspective.** Graphic system that creates the illusion of depth and volume on a flat surface.

**Medium (Media).** Material(s) used to create works of art.

**Middleground.** The area of an artwork that appears to be between the foreground and the background.

**Mixed Media.** Two or more media used in one artwork.

**Mobile.** A sculpture with a balanced arrangement of moveable parts.

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**Modeling.** An additive process of sculpture in which soft, pliable material is built up and shaped.

**Mosaic.** Artwork made with small cubes of colored paper, marble, glass or tile and set into cement.

**Motif.** Unit that is repeated in visual rhythm.

**Movement.** Principle of design that deals with creating the illusion of action or physical change in position.

**Mural.** Painting on wall or ceiling.

**Narrative.** The written word describing a visual work of art and/or its artist (usually, but not confined to art history texts).

**Negative Space.** Empty space surrounding shapes and forms.

**Neutral Colors.** Black, white and gray.

**Objective.** Knowledge which some believe to be independent of experience and personal feeling.

**Oil Paint.** Pigments in linseed oil or another vegetable drying oil to make a smooth paste consistency; permanent color.

**Opaque.** Quality of a material that does not let any light pass through.

**Outline.** Line that shows the outer edges.

**Paint.** Pigments mixed with oil or water.

**Palette.** Tray for mixing colors of paints; colors used in a particular work of art.

**Papier Mache.** Modeling material made of paper and liquid paste molded over a supporting structure.

**Pastels.** Pigments held together with gum and molded into sticks.

**Pattern.** Decorative visual repetition.

**Performance Art.** A type of art in which events are planned and enacted before an audience for aesthetic reasons.

**Perspective.** Refers to two major systems for showing depth and distance in a work of art (linear perspective and atmospheric perspective).

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**Photography.** The art or process of producing pictures by the action of light on surfaces sensitized by various processes.

**Picture Plane.** The flat surface of a two-dimensional art work.

**Pigment.** Finely ground, colored powders that form paint when mixed with a liquid.

**Portfolio.** A body of finished work.

**Portrait.** Image of a person, especially the face and upper body.

**Positive Space.** Shapes or spaces that are or represent solid objects.

**Principles of Art.** Ways artists organize the elements of art. The principles consist of balance, emphasis, harmony, variety, gradation, movement, rhythm, and proportion.

**Printmaking.** The artist designs and manufactures one or a series of prints, such as woodcuts, silk-screens, linoleum, etc.

**Process Portfolio.** A portfolio that includes a series of work that changes over time.

**Proportion.** The size relationships of one part to the whole or of one part to another part.

**Reflection.** The act of serious thought or contemplation; thoughtful consideration of an artwork.

**Relief.** Sculpture that projects from a flat background.

**Repetition.** Technique for creating rhythm and unity in which a motif appears again and again.

**Rhythm.** Principle of art that indicates movement by the repetition of elements.

**Rubric.** A guide for judgement or assessment; a description of expectations.

**Sculpture.** A three dimensional work of art.

**Shade.** The darkness of a color; may be achieved by adding black.

**Shape.** Element of art that defines a two dimensional space.

**Sketch.** Quick, rough drawing without much detail that can be used as a plan for later work.

**Space.** The element of art referring to the emptiness or area between, around, above, below or within objects.

**Stippling.** Painting, drawing, etc. by means of flecks or dots.

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**Style.** Identifying characteristics of a particular artist, period, group or movement.

**Surface Design.** The patterning, coloring and transformation of fibers and other materials directed toward art and design.

**Symbol.** Lines, shapes and colors used to represent something else.

**Synthesize.** To form a whole from separate parts (visualizing).

**Technique.** A specific way to create artwork, often by following a step-by-step procedure.

**Tempera.** Paint made by mixing pigments with egg yolk.

**Texture.** Actual or implied appearances of surface characteristics (e.g., rough or smooth).

**Three Dimensional.** 3-D form – measured by height, width, and depth.

**Tint.** Light value of a color made by mixing with white.

**Tone.** Tint or shade; may be achieved by adding black or white to a color.

**Transparent.** Quality of a material that allows light to pass through.

**Two Dimensional.** 2-D form- measured by height and width.

**Unity.** Principle of design that allows a combination of elements, principles, and media to be viewed as a whole.

**Value.** The lightness or darkness of a hue or neutral color.

**Value Scale.** The range of values from black to white and light to dark.

### **Visual Art Components.**

*Production* – visual art making.

*Aesthetics* – relating to value, beauty and theory.

*Criticism* – the process of judging visual art works and/or their narratives.

*History* – recordings of the past.

**Wash.** Thin, liquid application of paint in any medium.

**Watercolor.** Pigments dispensed in a gum Arabic solution; a work of art so produced; also, the paint used in this technique; water based.

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**Weaving.** Interlacing strands of material.

**Wheelbuilt.** Referring to the use of a mechanical device in order to form clay